The Threefold Way

by

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"The Song of the Flaming Heart," etc.

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FOREWORD.

ANYONE who reads this little treatise with attention will perceive that it strives to indicate a Way of life, action and thought, to follow which involves a turning back from the Way of the World. This naturally demands prolonged self-discipline by which old habits of life, action and thought are transmuted into others of greater vitality, power and wisdom; and such self-discipline is inevitably painful to the natural man in the same way that athletic training is painful. Hence one great religion designates THE THREEFOLD WAY the 'Path of Sorrow,' and another the 'Path of Woe.' But this is only from the point of view of the natural man

who finds himself hustled, harried and dragooned by the insistent striving of the Spirit within him. When we succeed in realising that we are really that Spirit and not the man of flesh, desire and ignorance, when we learn to stand aside from ourself, to begin to pull ourself together, and by a process of gentle but persistent transmutation to modify our habits of life, action and thought until they are brought into harmony with the will of the Spirit, we find that THE THREEFOLD WAY is one of ever-increasing joy. But we must try the experiment for ourselves, no one can do it for us any more than he can eat our food for us. The Quest must be embraced whole-heartedly, no half-measures are possible, it is all or nothing. Therefore let each one consider well whether he sees his way to devote

his life, his energy and his thought, first and last and all the time, to his spiritual development, before he undertakes the 'great work.' In the MASTER'S own words, 'For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?' Where there's a will there's a way, where there is no will the way is not yet. Most will go on in the old way for many a life before they have learned all its lessons and had all its experiences, before, in fact, 'the great famine' arises in the land and drives the prodigal to 'come to himself.' But in these latter days there are some who find themselves at this stage of their development, and to them a striver and seeker holds out the hand of fellowship across the void. One word of warning he would like to give:

It is not enough to take an intellectual interest in these things, to talk about the methods of the inner life, or to criticise the struggles of saints and mystics; all this is only waste of time. The venture of faith must be made, and the great experiment tried, by 'right life, right action and right thought'; and the life may be lived, the work done and the truth seen by perseverance in the methods of THE THREEFOLD WAY.

THE AUTHOR.

THE THREEFOLD WAY.

SEEK it not by any one road. To each temperament there is one road which seems the most desirable. But the way is not found by devotion alone, by religious contemplation alone, by ardent progress, by self-sacrificing labour, by studious observation of life. None alone can take the disciple more than one step onward. . . . The whole nature of man must be used wisely by the one who desires to enter the way.

Light on the Path.

ST. AUGUSTINE said that the three fundamental powers of man's nature are knowing, doing, and being, and these are clearly the same as the three powers of the Spirit as taught in mysticism—wisdom, activity and

vitality or light, love and life. They correlate with the Platonic trinity of the true, the good and the beautiful. The ceaseless quest to attain these three ideals through the growth of the three powers is what I mean by THE THREEFOLD WAY, and the methods of seeking it which I have placed at the head of this paper fall into three corresponding groups. Studious observation of life (and the writer might perhaps have added, abstract thought) belongs to the search for the true, the Path of Knowledge; ardent progress and self-sacrificing labour to the pursuit of the good, the Path of Action; devotion and religious contemplation to the quest of the beautiful, the Path of Love by which man becomes united with the Spiritual Self within him. As the Teacher says, to each temperament there is one of

these roads which seems the most desirable, but as each one has all three powers in his nature, a balanced and all-round development will be best pursued by a careful attention to all, especially to those which do *not* seem particularly desirable, and hence tend to be neglected. So the whole nature of man may be used wisely.

To those who have read my little book, *The Seven Rays of Development*, it will be of interest to point out that devotion is the Way of the Ruler, religious contemplation that of the Priest, ardent progress that of the Man of Action, self-sacrificing labour that of the Healer, studious observation of life that of the Thinker, and, we may perhaps venture to add, devotion to the ideal that of the Poetic Artist whose ray seems to be intermediate between that of the

Ruler and the Thinker. It is taught that our successive personalities are brought on to all these rays more or less in turn, while our reincarnating Self remains evermore on one; hence the differing temperaments, which make the various ways seem desirable, are all the while shot through by the fundamental one which tends to come more and more into prominence as the lives roll by, and the Pilgrim of Eternity within grows stronger. Hence the profound differences in character between individuals, and also the changes which appear in the character of a single individual as different traits emerge in the course of a life. But until the strong leading of our Pilgrim Self presents itself we find ourselves here, to make the best of our present life, to learn as much truth, do as much good and become as beautiful

as we can. Of course if our nose is too long or too short, and our mouth not of the purest Greek type, we shall not alter either in this life, any more than by taking thought we shall add a cubit to our stature. But the essential element in beauty is not external symmetry but internal harmony among all the organs of the body, so that the power of the spiritual life shines forth as radiant health and vitality; it is a unification of the physical body with the spiritual fountain of life, for in the last analysis I believe that the beautiful and the vital are one. The recognition of the necessity of cultivating health and vitality as an essential element of the spiritual life is of the first importance, for it is only by means of a perfectly healthy body that we can think our best or do our best. Great Saints have done much in feeble

bodies it is true, but they would have done more and lasted longer in the Master's service had they kept themselves in good health. When the duty of being beautifully healthy is recognised as just as much part of the spiritual life as doing good or seeking truth, a most valuable element of restraint and balance is introduced by which the excesses either in activity, or study, to which mystics are so prone, are properly corrected, and better work and truer thought are the result.

For those who are asking the question, 'What am I to do about it now?' I have tried to clearly define the methods which I have found helpful in striving to follow the quest of the inner life as mapped out by the mystics of all ages. Those who ask this question in serious earnest and are prepared to work out

the answer in their own life, conduct and thought, have reached the stage of Awakening referred to by the Christ in the immortal words, 'And when he had come to himself he said, How many of the hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, while I perish with hunger.' The 'father' symbolises the divine Self within us, whose 'son' we, as the personality are, while we are identified with that citizen of the far country, and are feeding the swine of our own desires. Then follows the second stage of the mystic way, that of Self-discipline, indicated in the words, 'And he arose and came to his father.' A short sentence but a long journey on a stony road, which involves taking ourselves in hand and ordering our life, our action and our thought as they should be ordered in the interest of our

true Self. But those who try the experiment know that every effort is rewarded by consolations and intimations from within. After innumerable falls and failures they find that the rapture of pursuing is the prize the vanquished gain; and when they understand that these disasters are all part of the great game and quite inevitable experiences, they do not worry too much, but get up and go on again. They find that the divine Self within is waiting to help, watching for their coming, meeting them halfway as the Master said, 'And while he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.' Thus the third stage of the way is reached, that of Illumination, symbolised by the kiss of the father; it involves making a real contact with the true Self

through the intuition, so that spiritual wisdom, power and life begin to pour into the personality and to transmute it into a fit vehicle for the manifestation of that Self. The fourth stage is Self-abnegation, the 'naughting' of the lower self as the old mystics call it, which takes place as the transmutation proceeds. The consciousness wavers between the standpoint of the Pilgrim of Eternity within and that of the personal self, sometimes realising itself as the Pilgrim, sometimes falling back to the personal point of view, thinking and acting sometimes from the one, sometimes from the other, ever striving to deny the lower and hold to the higher. This struggle involves the gradual elimination of the lower self as the consciousness frees itself from the illusion of personality, a realisation indicated in the words,

'Father I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants.' The fifth stage is Union, permanent identification with the Immortal Self, perfect assurance of immortality and of the fundamental rightness of the world in spite of all appearances—cosmic consciousness in fact. It is symbolised in the triumphant close of the wonderful story which drew tears from the eyes of St. Augustine. The 'best robe' is the spiritual body, the permanent vehicle of the Self, into which the consciousness is raised by the identification of the transmuted prodigal, now 'one' with his 'father,' with the immortal Pilgrim. The Self has become detached from the personality which remains as a mere vehicle through which he manifests his vitality, power and wisdom.

It has become a 'hired servant' in fact, with bread enough and to spare for all the truly poor—those who seek the bread of wisdom. It is plain, I think, that a man who has attained this union would realise himself as a Pilgrim of Eternity, and would be aware of his immortality, would feel it in his very bones with an unshakable assurance, would perceive beneath the stress, sorrow and suffering of an evolution yet imperfect the beneficent power of the Supreme Love. But we cannot know this for certain till we have tried the great experiment for ourselves, the quest is before us to be followed or evaded, taken or left. Many are called but few chosen, for they choose themselves only when they are ready ; and it would seem that the great majority of Selves are still busy developing their personalities, training their

lower vehicles, learning to play the game of life. They are still on the path of outgoing, journeying to the far country or wasting their substance with riotous living, it is not time yet for them to seek the 'way back.' Not until they have spent all, and experienced the great famine, and joined the citizen, and fed the swine, will they come to themselves. If all turned upon one short life on earth it would indeed be a desperate matter, for it is evident that the great majority are not seeking the inner Kingdom now. But the 'Old, old Path' remains for the seeker who has reached 'Awakening,' and in the East is always said to comprise three Paths, those of Devotion, Action and Knowledge, and some are of opinion that these should be kept apart and followed singly and not together. But as we

have a vehicle of life, of activity and of thought—body, soul and mind—one of which corresponds to each of these methods, it has always seemed to me wise to try to combine them, and in our way of life to strive for the beauty of perfect health, in our action to strive to do good work and in our thought to strive for wisdom. The mind is brought into harmony with the wisdom of the spirit by ordered and strenuous thought, by conscious detachment from personal prejudices and desires, but this will not be possible unless the brain and body are perfectly sound and healthy, and in proper tune with the spiritual source of life. So the soul, the body of desire and consequent action, will not be able to manifest the spiritual power of good-will, unless its physical centre in the heart, whence emotion pours into the

body and stimulates it to action, is in true accord with the spiritual source of energy. The etheric body may be brimming with spiritual life, but unless the corresponding physical centre is in healthy harmony with it, we can neither be physically well nor radiate health and healing on those around us. Even some of the great Saints with all their advancement found the truth of this, for when they had neglected and macerated their body beyond a certain point, it became incapable of transmitting their wisdom and power, it very naturally fell out of harmony, then they experienced what they called spiritual darkness and dryness, they neither grasped the true nor desired the good, but were plunged in dark despair which to-day we should diagnose as the result of nervous prostration, but which they,

as they lay in sackcloth and ashes, attributed to the will of God. *Why* the ALL-WISE, ALL-GOOD and ALL-BEAUTIFUL should be supposed to reduce His children to such a state of uselessness, they never seem to have enquired, and that it might all be due to their own ignorance and wrong-living they never dreamed. St. Theresa used to tell her nuns to remember that they were ill under these circumstances, she was far too able a woman not to see such an obvious fact, but she never went on to look for the true cause of their illnesses, or took any steps to moderate the extremes of their asceticism. Ignatius Loyola, however, having tried the experiment, and found that if you fast beyond a certain point the body cannot digest the simplest food, forbade all such excesses among his

followers; but he never recovered his own health and suffered from desperate dyspepsia for the rest of his life.

We, who seek the true way, may well take it that our first effort in the direction of self-discipline should be made by ordering our physical life on the lines of what Andrew Clarke used to call 'The Gospel of physiological righteousness.' Of the four cardinal virtues the first concerns the body—it is temperance, moderation in all things, the middle way of the Buddha. Neither too much nor too little food, water, air, heat, light, exercise and sleep; a wise use of the natural elements and activities. But we shall have to 'lose our life' as the world lives it, and come out from among them and their bad habits, if we are to 'find it' thus on the plane of health and beauty. However it has got to be done,

and done right, or our body can never become the radiant organ of the life of the spirit within us. It is really all quite simple, but about as easy to get people to carry out as it is to get a paralysed man to take up his bed and walk. Some have tried the experiment, however, with the best results, combined with other physical methods, such as rhythmic breathing and walking, some simple forms of physical culture, and immediately by the practice of THE THREEFOLD WAY of *concentration*, *meditation* and *contemplation*.

For those who live in the world and are exposed to its potent and perpetual impacts, it seems necessary to take all these measures to bring the body into harmony with the spirit. If we could live in a convent, and spend our life in perpetual adoration of the Blessed

Sacrament; or if we could retire into the jungle and meditate for ever, far from the crowded world; or if we could isolate ourself in some palace of art where perfect beauty and harmony reigned, it is possible that the body would so respond to its surroundings, that the powers of the spirit would be able to harmonise it without further trouble on our part, by means of the practice of contemplation alone. But as a matter of practical experience, this does not generally happen in the world, and most of us go on year after year, halting between innumerable opinions, trying various methods half-heartedly and failing to persevere with any, and actually just drifting the world's way in spite of all our seeking, in spite of the efforts of all our teachers, and in spite of the example of the Great Ones who

have gone before. What are we going to do about it now ?

The first method of THE THREEFOLD WAY is that of *concentration*, by which we follow the Path of Action. This most important power of making the mind one-pointed, and holding it steadily on a definite thing is best cultivated by concentrating the attention on each action as we do it, by giving our whole mind to our work however trivial or unpleasant, so as to do it as quickly and perfectly as possible. If you are dressing attend fully to every detail and practise concentration there ; if you are writing a letter see to it that it is perfectly written and expressed as a work of art ; if you are reading make your mind take in everything the author has to tell you, and if it wanders pull it up and make it read the whole passage over

again. If you will remember all day long to practise in this way it will soon become a habit and be done without effort, you will become far more efficient, all your work will be done better, for concentration brings skill in action, you will do more work in less time and so be ready for other activities and further growth. Having trained your power thus on little things you will find that in a crisis your mind will be ready to seize the difficulty and solve it in a flash; if you will not take the trouble to train it, the crisis will arrive and you will be found wanting. Let no one think that efficiency in action is not part of spiritual development, for one of the great Saints said that the true sign of spirituality is doing the commonest things in the best possible way. Thus the helper side of the true Self is brought into

activity, and his spiritual power begins to reinforce the personal energy. The personal motives which make us act are infinite in number, they are stimuli which reach us from without, either directly, or in the form of memories and determinations, recollections of past stimulations; the spiritual motive is one, the will to help on the evolution of the world, to push behind the great car of the universe, to serve the race and every man in it in the best possible way. This is the sole motive of those in whom the spiritual Self is fully developed, and, at the same time, the lower motives of the personality entirely eliminated. The Path of Action involves the gradual transmutation of motive from the push of the without, when we are slaves, to the direction of the inner will, when we are free men; for to be a slave is to do

what we are obliged, and to be free is to do what we choose, and the illusion of personality is to imagine that our desires and wishes are our real will, when they are only the emotional habits of our lower vehicles which are out of control and so enslave us.

But on the Path of Action we learn to change all this, and take as our ideal the becoming a helper of the world. All the duties of life can be used as means of this spiritual development, no matter what they are, if we do them perfectly as our contribution to the general good. If everyone did his work as well as he possibly could all round, the world would be a very different place, and each one who works in this spirit is really a world-helper. Further, everyone we meet in the course of the day can be helped in some way, if we are ready,

with sympathetic interest, to attend to him. A suggestion from our own experience will often solve a problem for a younger soul, an idea from among the many which have helped ourselves will open the eyes of another as it opened ours. There is really no greater service we can render than to bring the inner way to people's knowledge, and make them see that there is a deal of sense in it; and there is nothing which helps our own understanding more than trying to put such a matter clearly before another mind, and answering its questions. They are the same questions which we asked ourselves, but they come at a new angle; through another mind we get an outlook which our own could never take, so the subject is viewed from a different aspect and many new truths become apparent to us. If we carefully

avoid dogmatism, we can discuss reincarnation and the development of the Pilgrim Self, and such matters, on their merits, and so get many a truth into people's heads by a side wind. It is my belief that when a truth has once been implanted in a man's brain it can never be lost; it is harmonious with the power of the True which is trying ever to emerge from his spiritual centre, and illuminate his brain-consciousness, it will therefore be held by that power in his mind and wait till he chooses to attend to it. It may never emerge from his sub-consciousness in this life, but he will be more ready to accept it in another. By patiently sowing such seed we are always helping the world along its appointed path.

This question of 'helping others' is really an exceedingly difficult one, as the

charitable workers have found out by experience. How to give money without pauperising, debilitating the will, and generally deteriorating the individual, is a problem which has not altogether been solved. Similarly, to do other people's work while they idle does not help their growth; even if we do the work better we rob them of the practice by which they develop. We do no good by yielding to whims and desires, for passion grows by what it feeds on, so the more we indulge the desires of others the more enslaved they become. The true way lies in the direction of thinking of the real Self within a man, who has to be waked up, and drawn forth, and encouraged, and to this end his personality has to be controlled rather than indulged, restrained and shown the better way by example rather than by

precept. We shall help better by suggestion than by laying down the law, by a story to the point, a true thing said in jest, an illustration from our own experience, than by lectures which are resented and therefore not followed, however admirable they may be. We help most by giving new ideas, by passing on the light as far as we can, and then letting people take it or leave it as they like; if they are able to grasp it they will do so, if not, it is wiser to drop the subject. As Lao Tsu said, 'The best charity is letting alone,' and when we have done what we could we cannot do better.

The second method of THE THREEFOLD WAY concerns the ordering of thought, study, learning, science and philosophy, all that goes to make up our knowledge of the True. It should always

be remembered that the Good is only the True put into practice, and that it is impossible to do the one without knowing the other. The good-will to help is not enough, it is a blind energy and just as likely to do harm as good when directed by ignorance, so most of the efforts to help the world fail from lack of wisdom. On the other hand mere knowledge is barren without the will to use it for the general good. Hence the Path of Knowledge is not trodden by memorising the thoughts of other men, or by learning the details of all the sciences, or by being able to quote the views of all the philosophers, or even by knowing the best that has been said on every subject in the world; but it is found by listening to the intuition of the True which comes into the quiet mind. We have to find the inner

light, and by it work with the facts of our own experience and our own nature. We have to learn to stand aside from ourself, and observe our own feelings, instincts, impulses, sensations, desires, impressions and perceptions and understand them, and discriminate between those that are false, exaggerated, imperfect or biassed, and those which are true facts of the states of our lower vehicles and of the outer world. We have to train our powers of observation and inference so that they become accurate and no longer mislead us. We have to keep a perfectly open mind, and welcome any new knowledge which comes our way, and be ready to modify our views in accordance with it, just as the scientist modifies his theories in accordance with the new discoveries which come to light. So by a process

of patient adjustment of our mind to the truth of things, as it gradually becomes clear to us, we come to 'attain knowledge' and the impartiality which goes with it.

We have the theory of the inner life, laid down by the saints and mystics who have lived it in the past, systematised in the creeds, inculcated in the religions, but we can only prove its reality for ourselves by living it and getting its experiences. It is said to bring about increased vitality, power and wisdom, a consciousness of immortality, and a conviction of the justice of God in the universe. There is said to be a spiritual being, a child of God, developing within us, by means of the experiences of a series of earth lives, and that the solar system exists for the purpose of this evolution. This inner being is

our 'personal God,' our 'Father in heaven,' the manifestation within us of the Supreme Self, and by becoming identified with him, we may attain cosmic consciousness, the power to help the world, and immortal life. It is a transmutation, a permanent change of the point of view from that of the personal man to that of the Pilgrim of Eternity, whose instrument for knowing truth, doing good and becoming beautiful the personality really is.

The method by which this realisation is attained, and by which we are enabled to see into the truth of things for ourselves, is *meditation*. I can of course only indicate what this means for me. You set aside half an hour daily at the same time, and sit perfectly still alone in the same room and chair, so taking advantage of the automatic habit of the

lower vehicles which is thus established, and enables them to be more easily stilled. You deliberately put away the world and its insistent cares and distractions, and also your own feelings, desires and prejudices. You remain steady in a restful position, and concentrate on holding your mind perfectly quiet, and on excluding all the thoughts which drift through it. Only those who sit down to try this experiment, realise the streams of alien ideas which normally drift through their consciousness, and occupy their idle attention. These thoughts must be steadily banished by an effort of will, and the practice of *concentration* already described alone makes the work possible. When your mind is clear and steady you take the subject on which you seek light, this you should select beforehand and write

down. It may be either concrete, such as some difficulty in life, some mistake you have made, some hard saying from a mystical book, or it may be an abstract idea such as justice, truth or love. Suppose you take a difficulty in life. You say to yourself, 'I am a Pilgrim of Eternity, I will see the truth of this at all costs, and the way out.' Then you take the difficulty and hold it steadily 'before your mind's eye' and wait. By degrees the memories of all the facts which led up to it, and bear upon it, and elucidate it, will come into your mind; you will see where you have been wrong and ignorant and mistaken, and what you must do to set the matter right. It may take you weeks to get to the bottom of it, but you will do it if you persevere. If you take a hard saying and treat it in the same way, you

will find that other sayings which throw light upon it will come to you, things you have read, or heard said on the subject will present in consciousness, you will be able to relate experiences of your own to it, which clear up the meaning, till at last the whole thing will be plain to your understanding. In this way you give your own insight, which is the direct perception of truth of your Pilgrim Self, an opportunity of penetrating into your waking mind. Again, suppose you want to understand more thoroughly what justice really is. You take this abstract idea and hold it steadily at the 'back of your mind' in this case, saying, 'Now I will see the truth about justice.' Again you wait, looking out into your mind lying like a clear lake before you, and slowly all the memories which you have collected

in your life of the working out in experience of justice will present themselves. You will be able to compare one instance with another, and distinguish types and methods, and so gradually the matter will open out, and you will gain a greatly increased grasp of the essentials of justice, and the way it should be put into practice. So you may take all the virtues in turn, particularly the cardinal ones, since temperance belongs to the body, fortitude to the soul, prudence to the mind, and justice to the spirit. If you can realise the true inwardness of each of these, and carry it out in life, your meditations will not have been in vain.

The third method of THE THREEFOLD WAY, by which the Path of Devotion of life is trodden, is that of *contemplation*. By this effort the physical life is unified with that of the spirit within, and the

body brought into perfect harmony with 'the well of water springing up to eternal life,' of which the Master spoke to the woman of Samaria. First, as I have said, your life must be ordered along the lines of beauty and health, and then at the end of your daily meditation, when the lower vehicles have been stilled and you have entered the silence, you pass to contemplation. Again I can only say what this means for me. You call up by the aid of your creative imagination the Image of the Divine Humanity which most appeals to you, in the form of the Christ, or the Lord Krishna, or the Buddha of Compassion, or the Veiled Isis, or Eros the Immortal Youth, or last and perhaps best your own "Flaming Heart," the Pilgrim of Eternity within, with whom you have to become identified. You imagine this Divine

Figure standing in your heart, and pouring his powers of life, love and light into your body and brain. If you will practise patiently in this way, one day you will begin to feel the radiation thrilling through every nerve, vitalising, encouraging and enlightening your whole being. Then you will begin to know for yourself some of the unspeakable things which can never be told, because they can only be experienced. But this is only the beginning, what may happen further you will perhaps find out for yourself when you have tried the experiment sufficiently long.

I have dwelt on the Way of the Beautiful because it is generally neglected by those who seek the inner life, and so they add greatly to their difficulties, for with an unharmonised unvitalised body and brain the true

cannot be perfectly known, and the good cannot be perfectly done. The care of the body is the reverse of selfish therefore, and has nothing to do with vanity or self-indulgence, it demands indeed discipline and sacrifice and constant effort in order to make the body a fit habitation for the Divine Self, an organ for the radiation of his life, power and wisdom, and an abiding place for that love which is his inmost essence, and evermore draws all into the Unity of the Supreme Self.

To sum up, the Spirit within you itself is Love, its powers are Life, Energy and Wisdom. You unite your body with its Life by *contemplation*, your soul with its Power by *concentration*, your mind with its Wisdom by *meditation*, and at last you will attain identification, and become Love In-

carnate yourself through your union with the Divine One within, sooner or later, in one life or another, by the perpetual practice of THE THREEFOLD WAY.

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